HOMECOMING
(CARL AND ANNA)

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ANNA .. .. DITA PARLO
RICHARD .. .. .. LARS HANSEN

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CARL .. .. .. GUSTAV FROLICH

HOMECOMING

(CARL AND ANNA)

BY

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

Karl und Anna was first published in Germany in 1927, *and was the immediate cause of Herr Leonhard Frank's election to the German Academy of Letters. It was produced as a play in Germany (the author himself having dramatised the story) in February* 1929, *and an English version of the Play will shortly be performed in London. The story was filmed in Germany in* 1928; *and is now being shown under the title of Homecoming, and this edition of the book contains four illustrations from the film.*

HOMECOMING
(CARL AND ANNA)

I

Above the far-distant curve of the earth, which was the horizon of the steppe, on the frontiers of Europe and Asia, a point appeared, smaller than a song-bird; and though it approached the two men at a speed of nearly a hundred miles an hour, it seemed to hang motionless on the same spot of blue distance, so overwhelmingly vast were earth and sky.

Despite its speed, a quarter of an hour had passed before the aeroplane was recognisable as such, and though it flew on at the same height, it seemed to ascend skywards in an immense arc.

Poised in the shimmering air above the two men, the pilot saw on the steppe beneath him a gigantic black cross, many miles long and

broad: a longitudinal and a lateral trench, dug by the two men out of the dark earth of the steppe.

The pilot could not guess what purpose this cruciform trench was meant to serve in the lonely, uninhabited steppe. He flew on westwards, keeping always at the same height, but seeming now to glide in an immense arc towards the earth. A quarter of an hour more, and he sank, again no bigger than a tiny bird, behind the horizon of the steppe.

The two men were alone again in the vast solitude.

They themselves did not know the purpose of the cruciform trench. They could only conjecture that years previously the construction of a dam had been planned, so that in case of need the steppe could be flooded to check the advance of hostile troops.

Immediately after being taken prisoner at the outbreak of war, they had been sent here, with rations, which were renewed monthly, and a portable corrugated-iron shed; and for four summers they had dug, without guards or supervision. They rested often and long; sometimes they slept half the day through in

the grass of the steppe; but in the end they had always gone back to work. For a man must do something.

Birds flew constantly to and fro, seeking food, and in the myriad-voiced, fluctuating chorus of the grasshoppers lay a profound silence, as though earth had reached the noon of life, and was waiting and listening.

The pickaxe severed a worm. The man pulled the half worm out of the ground and threw it into the air. A bird caught it in flight.

"I always used to lie on the inside of the bed, by the wall, and she on the outside; and when she got up in the morning I never heard her. She was very quiet, d'you see?—ever so quiet."

"You've told me about that before. You never used to wake up till the gas-jet began to whistle."

"That's right; always in the same tone. I was often going to see to it. But then I had to join up." The married man went on shovelling. He had let his beard grow and looked unkempt.

His companion lay close by. He chewed a

blade of grass, then another. "I wonder how it comes about that her breast is so white and her hips and body so much darker?" And when the married man made no reply: "Like bronze, you say?"

"When you have her, your mind's just wiped out."

Half an hour later—several times, and without discoverable cause, the swarm of birds had risen in a dense mass, alighted farther away on the steppe, and come swarming back again—he added: "But that'll soon be four years ago. Sometimes I can't even remember what she looks like, can't see her face, can't recall it! You know, Carl, it all gets blurred. But when I dream of her, she's so living I could touch her."

"I know exactly what she looks like. . . . And the sort of ways she has. I know all about her."

"But you've never even seen her. . . . I should soon be with her if I was in that aeroplane, far away as she is. . . . Lord, who could stand this! Four years!"

"At any rate, you've got somebody in the world who's thinking of you."

" Yes, that's so. That's right enough."

" Some one who's there, waiting for you. But I—when I begin to think about things—there's just nothing there at all."

" Yes, she's waiting. If she's still alive."

" She's still alive," cried the other quickly ; and he let himself sink down to the ground again, and looked out across the steppe. He saw the woman he had never seen, saw her dusting the chest of drawers in the little room he had never set foot in, saw her cross to the old sofa to smooth out the cover. She bent down over it. He knew that the sofa stuck out askew into the room, and he knew the colour and pattern of the cover.

" Richard ! I say, Richard, if she was here now, your wife, would you—Richard, would you let me have her, just once ? "

The married man rested both hands on the handle of the spade, and his chin on his hands. " If she was here now——" He could not grasp the idea.

" Tell me."

He looked down for a long while at the man lying near him. " I might. . . . Because you're in the same damned plight as I am.

. . . Once. . . . Perhaps. . . . But if you tried again, I'd smash your head in with the pick."

" I wonder if the gas-jet still whistles."

The shadow of a cloud fell. The song of the grasshoppers ebbed back into the steppe and died away. From quite close by came a single, short chirp. The last grasshopper fell silent. In the utter stillness the men were suddenly aware of the pulsing of their blood. In the distance, patches of steppe where the sun still shone flamed up like bright gold.

The cloud shadow paled, and expired in blinding sunshine. The summer chorus with its myriad voices began again, undulating from horizon to horizon. Not a blade of grass stirred.

" But Anna would never do it. She's not for other men. . . . I've told you how it was, on our first night, the trouble I had. She was turned twenty-three then—but I've told you all about it before. So you can judge for yourself, Carl."

During the four long summers, in which he had been alone with his longings, he had told his companion everything ; and yet normally he was a silent man. In retrospect even the

trials seemed beautiful, the daily struggle for bread, and to keep a roof over one's head. For now his trial was loneliness and the present.

Carl, the companion of his loneliness, knew that the mattress was in three parts, and the line of Anna's hips bold and undulating; that her feelings had always first to break through her modesty; that she was then an ardent woman, but otherwise very quiet, skilful, and neat. He knew that the ash-rake had a brass handle, and Anna three little moles, brown as satin. He knew where the stove and the ash-rake stood, and he knew where the three moles were. Since he had no one and nothing in the world, the picture of Anna had arisen in him.

"But suppose she's been unfaithful while you've been away, and taken some one else. Four years is a long time, Richard, for a woman with blood in her veins. . . . Perhaps you wouldn't be so slow either, if there were women in the grass here instead of grasshoppers."

"Now listen, and I'll tell you something you may not know. When Anna and I came into the city to live, we managed to get a nice little room, and furnished it right away on

the hire-purchase system. A week later I was called up."

" I know all about that. Six marks a month instalments."

" But before we knew I should have to go, we said to ourselves : Now we've just got to hang on to our home, and we shall be all right. And I'm sure Anna hasn't forgotten that. She's got no time for those other ideas. It'll be hard enough for her to keep the home together."

" Perhaps that's just why she——"

" What's it to do with you ? You can keep a clean tongue in your head, anyway. And as for Anna, I'd—— But I know. She wouldn't do a thing like that ! " He hove up his pick and brought it whizzing down.

Longing and impotence had often driven him to his task of enlarging the purposeless cross ; and now he succeeded in crushing down his doubts with hard work.

As a two-year-old child Carl had made a toy cart of his mother's bonnet. It had long ribbons, and he had harnessed himself as a horse between the ribbons and dragged the new bonnet behind him across the yard

through the puddles of rain-water. Since then the gift of imagination had brought him more pain than pleasure. He lay where he was, motionless, tormented by fancy, till the sun went down, and the raised pick of his comrade threw a gigantic shadow.

On the western horizon the fires of sunset were blazing. The reddening golden fly-wheel had not yet touched the margin. Now only the extreme tips of the blades of grass near the two men were gilded by the light. Farther on, the steppe was a deep, blackish green, and on the far eastern horizon night was already ascending. The grasshoppers raved. The warmth smelt moist.

Like the smith who, when his day's work is done, clears up his bench for the morrow, Richard shovelled the loose earth out of the trench before he put on his coat.

When they had walked for a quarter of an hour, their boots were squelching with moisture. The sky had paled. The corrugated-iron shed stood forlorn in the grey infinity.

Next morning they marched to the prison-camp to draw their rations. They had done the journey once a month for four summers,

a day's march each way, one walking behind the other. The grass always rose again when their feet had passed. Only a scarcely recognisable track remained.

Carl and Richard, skilled fitters, were both of the same height, and both had the dark complexion of the metal-worker.

In the camp, a group of prisoners stood ready to march. "We'll take one of those two to make up the number," said the guard, and called Richard's name.

Five minutes later—he had not had time to take leave of Carl—he found himself marching with the others to the railway station, whence the whole company was sent a few days' journey farther eastward.

II

On the day following Richard's departure, Carl escaped from the camp. The longing for Anna drove him forward on his long journey.

He had made up his mind to go into the room to her, to greet her as his wife, to claim that he was her husband, that he was Richard ; and he had resolved on this course because he was afraid that he might not otherwise be able to win her for good. An intrigue had no attractions for him. With instinctive urgency, his whole body demanded some one to whom he could be life and who could be life to him.

That he was of the same calling, had the same physical build, the same colour of hair and eyes, the dark skin common to all metal-workers ; that he even had, like Richard, peculiarly thick and strongly arched eyebrows —these things he considered but fleetingly.

He knew Anna's past life with Richard in all its details as intimately as though he had shared in it; he was completely filled with Anna's being. She had become for him in imagination the home that all men seek in a fellow-creature. He loved her.

Three months after his flight from the camp, Carl reached the city where Anna lived.

He had covered the vast distance in constant fear of capture, walking by night through forests, from hiding-place to hiding-place, across several frontiers, on foot along rivers in the blazing sun, and during this time he had seldom slept under a roof.

The first detached house-blocks of the suburb rose darkly amidst autumnal fields of stubble. He did not know the town, but he knew exactly how the house looked, and he knew the number. He knew the way. It was not far.

An evening storm had washed the dust from the face and shoes of the homecoming man.

He went into a barber's shop, placed his little bundle, which was wrapped in soaked

newspaper and fastened with a strap, on a seat, and laid his hat on top of it.

The barber hung the hat on a peg and pointed with upturned palm to a chair.

Even in captivity Carl had shaved himself every Saturday, and he had often remarked to Richard: "If you were always clean-shaven, and after all these years you go back home with a beard, Anna won't know you at first."

Filled with the joy and eagerness of a man who returns, after a long separation, to the wife he loves, Carl hurried along the street to the tenement where Anna lived. There was a little shoe-shop on the ground floor.

In the window lay three pairs of old shoes, a broken, overturned flower-pot, and a sleeping cat. The shop looked quite different from what Carl had imagined it. Four years ago, according to Richard's description, the window had been stacked with at least two hundred pairs of new shoes, each pair with a small blue card on which the price was embossed in large yellow figures, and right in front, on a glass plate in the middle, had stood a pair of particularly large patent-leather boots with bright

yellow uppers, and a show-card bearing the words, " Very smart."

Between then and now lies the war, thought Carl. He felt the pressure of anxiety above his stomach, and knew not why. His joy and eagerness were gone.

" Court two, left-hand door, second storey, and second door on the left." As he climbed the stairs, he noticed the scratches on the stencilled walls. Richard had drawn the pattern of the stencilling for him. The pressure above his stomach did not yield. He wanted to turn back and come later. Slowly he climbed the last two steps, glanced round, took the few remaining paces, and stood before the door. He read the name.

With his mind's eye he saw Anna standing at work in front of the gas-cooker, saw the back of her neck, her slightly bowed head. He saw her go over to the table and return to the gas-stove. Her movements came from the fullness and depth of her being, and were capable and complete ; they were profoundly familiar to him.

Carl had so exact a knowledge of Anna's appearance that if he had caught a fleeting

and distant glimpse of her in a crowded street, he would have recognised her at once.

Oppressed with heavy anxiety, he ran his large, firm, workman's hand between his collar and neck. Suddenly he saw himself going downstairs again.

Then he had already knocked and opened the door.

". . . Anna!"

She came from the window to the middle of the room, and took a plate from the table.

And he realised that even the most fervent image of the imagination is exceeded by the breathing, plastic reality of a human being, whose changing features are connected through the blood with the life, and are themselves the life; whose shape stands out from its background, whose movements cut into the surrounding space.

A shiver ran across Carl's skin. His joy broke out from his eyes. "Anna! Anna! D'you know me?" It was not a lie.

At sight of his joy, her fear left her. . . . With a sense of relief she asked frankly and with curiosity: "Who are you?"

Anna was wearing a washed-out blue frock

of coarse linen, which the sun had bleached to a lighter shade over her hips and high breasts. Her simple, firmly moulded face might have served Nature as a model for women with force, warmth, and unspoiled minds.

As at the barber's, he placed his bundle on the worn chair and his hat on the bundle. "I must clean off these chairs and stain them again. I told you when we got them that the stain wouldn't hold."

Anna immediately remembered that her husband had made this remark. Bewilderment overcame her.

"You haven't recognised me, then?"

"Who are you?"

His face turned white, even his lips: "Richard."

She stepped back, leaning with one hand on the table. "My husband? . . . You are not my husband."

"Anna!" Suddenly his knees were weak with emotion. He took two steps, and sat down. "Anna!"

His tone touched her.

As a woman goes on performing her small daily tasks even at a time when Fate has dealt

her its heaviest blow, so Anna went to the gas-cooker, put away the salt-box, collected the three spent matches, and stood for some seconds motionless, with head bent.

Her attitude was precisely that in which Carl had seen her, shortly before, with his mind's eye.

She turned round, as though she had been out to another room, and had just come back again into the kitchen. Flecks of red had appeared on her milky temples.

Her nature was too direct and candid entirely to refuse belief, even against her better knowledge, to one who spoke in such a tone as his. She looked at him like a woman grievously pressed who cannot defend herself.

"Well?" he said. "Well, Anna, don't you believe me? . . . There's no one in the world for me but you." The warm stream of life flowed in his smile, and all the adversity and all the happiness of life was there, and for him the lie turned to truth, as he said: "You're my wife."

Anna knew that he was not speaking the truth, and at the same time she felt in his words the sincerity of his feeling. She stood

with hands crossed below her breast, bewildered by the fact that the strange man sitting crouched forward on his chair was not entirely alien to her own feeling.

She went to the dresser. "Good heavens! Why do you say that?"

She rummaged in a drawer, and handed Carl a faded postcard: "Four years ago! Four years!" She crossed her hands again beneath her breast.

Carl read the card, which came from the military authorities. It stated that Richard had been killed in action on the 4th of September 1914. He turned the card over, turned it back again, read it a second time, and smiled: "It's all wrong, Anna; it's all wrong."

He put out his hand for hers. "What nonsense they write. . . . Take my word for it."

He was so moved and pervaded by happiness that for a second she did not withdraw her hand. There was fear in her face, and the insane hope of a woman who can believe, soon after her husband's death, that the door will open and the loved one come in as of old.

She tried to avoid the issue. "Perhaps

you're hungry ? " Next second she thought : I'll send him away. I'll shout for help to the neighbours. Meanwhile she cut the bread, laid a knife and fork on the table, and a piece of sausage on his plate. Should she peel the apple for him ?

" Surely you haven't forgotten . . ."

Quick as thought the blood mounted to her forehead. She peeled the apple, quartered it, cut out the core, skilfully, mechanically.

It was the first time in his life that he had been waited on by a woman he loved.

Happening to look up, she saw how moved he was, and a smile, transient and scarcely perceptible, came to break the deep gravity of her face. She pushed the plate a little nearer to him.

" What's become of the old fork that had the three prongs with one shorter than the others ? "

She went to the drawer as if in a dream, and brought him the fork.

" That's the one," he said, satisfied, and looked up at Anna, who sat down, still wrapped in her dream.

They sat beneath the lamp, shut off from

the outside world by four walls. The gas-mantle hummed. To his right was the bed; to his left, the dresser; and in front, sticking out into the room, the old sofa. The window was small and square. There was a smell of preserved fruit and a cool odour of flour. The six jars of fruit stood like an ornament on a shelf on the wall.

When two people are constantly together for years, each catches little mannerisms from the other—movements, words. In eating, this man cut his bread into long strips, like Richard. Anna watched him with dismay.

Carl had invaded her loneliness, which had lasted for years, awakening with his demands, his emotions, his atmosphere, her longing for more life. He released feelings that were in sharp antagonism to her reason. At moments when she stopped thinking, she believed.

"I'll go and look for a job on Monday, shall I?"

Then I needn't go on working in the factory, she thought. Then everything can be as it was before, even better, perhaps. ". . . Why do you say you're my husband? Why do you say that?"

" But, Anna, Anna ! "

" I used to be so fond of him. He was good to me, always good to me. I could never forget that. I could never forget him."

A wave of jealousy robbed him of his assurance. And for the first time he began to lie consciously, afraid lest he should lose the woman whom he had believed already won.

He pushed back the plate and looked round.

" The window-curtains are new ? The ones we bought together were yellow. The salesman said, ' They're a bargain.' D'you remember ? "

" I remember. God in heaven ! "

" How about the instalments on the furniture, Anna ? "

" I've had time to pay them off in these four years."

He smoothed his eyebrow, as another man might have smoothed his moustache. It was a habit he had caught from Richard. Anna watched him with a sense of shock.

" Then we can make a new start without too much trouble and responsibility. . . .

Things will go well now, Anna. . . . Look at me. . . . Look at me, Anna, please."

Her head dropped on to her folded arms.

"You must get used to it again." Under his hand, which constantly and tenderly stroked her hair, her quivering body gradually grew still.

She got up. Her features had become soft, and at the same time more composed. She cleared the table.

Carl stood quietly in the corner of the room, with bowed head.

A false word, a false note would have severed them at that moment like the stroke of a knife.

From her whole bearing—the way she tidied the slight disorder of the table, glanced at him now and then unsought, closed the window and drew the curtains—he saw that she had resolved to define her position to this new event, to see what was to come of it.

She answered his questions promptly, told him she worked in a cardboard-box factory, and how much she earned. As she spoke she was picking the faded flowers from the two geranium plants.

Then there was nothing more to do. She was ready to go to bed. She leaned with her back against the window-sill.

A tension arose between them, like that between two lovers, who are not yet closely intimate and find themselves alone together in a room.

" I've got exactly thirty-five pfennigs," he said, with a sudden outbreak of gaiety.

She pointed with her finger to the sofa. " You can sleep there." And her hand went back immediately to the window-sill.

When he took his eyes from the sofa and glanced at her again, she was already at the linen-chest. She chose the best sheets and put a cover on a pillow from her own bed. " We'd better push it against the wall," she said.

Together they pushed the sofa against the wall.

Anna bent down to spread the bedclothes, precisely as he had seen her do it when he was lying thousands of miles away on the steppe.

" I'll put out the light," she said. It was already dark.

While undressing, he stopped once and sat quite still, listening for the slight sounds she made. And immediately she stopped moving also, with one leg across the other, and both hands on the stocking she had half pulled down.

He was on his back, with his hands beneath his head and his eyes open, listening. For a time he could hear nothing. "Are you in bed?" he asked.

He repeated his question. And knew from the tone of her "Yes" that she too was lying wide awake with open eyes.

The veiled roar of the city, with its pervading theme of hoots from near and distant cars, surrounded the profound stillness of the room.

Dreading the intimacy of sound, Anna did not move in bed. Not till she heard his regular breathing did she guardedly change the uncomfortable position in which she was lying.

It was weeks since Carl had slept between clean sheets. The muscles of his legs twitched from over-exertion. River-banks, broad, glittering sheets of water, rocky cliffs, dark forests, endless white roads, distant views, and vivid

near details, quivered through his brain, like a nature-film cut into a thousand pieces and re-assembled haphazard.

Then the landscape of his boyhood opened before him, deeply familiar to his dreaming mind. A boy again, ten years old, he was walking out of the town with his father, across the fields, towards a village that lay among gently rolling hills under the freshness of a Sunday morning.

They turned into the village inn, and sat down under an old tree. Close by was the garden, bright with flowers. The old farmer went past outside, down the peaceful village street. He nodded to them.

Carl's father was joking with the landlord's daughter. He caught hold of her arm.

"You mustn't touch her," said Carl. "That's Anna."

His father at once withdrew his hand.

Then the landlord's daughter put her arm round Carl's shoulder, and with a motherly glance pushed a large glass of milk towards him.

With a peaceful feeling of happiness and security, he awoke from his dream.

Anna was sleeping.

Stirred suddenly by a sense of the most precious responsibility, he listened to the mystery of the sleeping, breathing woman. Thankfulness overpowered him.

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RICHARD .. .. .. LARS HANSEN

III

Richard was sitting on the camp-bed in the corrugated-iron shed. "Well, listen!" he said; and, pursing his lips, he imitated the whistling of the gas-cooker at home.

The train rushed darkly away into the plain; crawled, a thin line, through the green of the horizon. Carl listened to a sound in the distance, the far-away, long-drawn, scarcely audible whistle of the engine, which came from Richard's carefully pursed lips. He opened his eyes.

The room was filled with morning sunshine. An aluminium saucepan of steaming water stood on the gas-cooker, whose choked burner gave out a monotonous whistle. Anna's bed was empty, the coverlet thrown back.

"Four? But you never have more than two." The baker dug into the mountain of rolls for two more brown ones, such as Anna liked. "And now you want four?"

A sudden sense of happiness released a smile within her and imprinted it on her blushing face. The two rows of teeth were very large, regular, and white.

Anna had the milky complexion of the red-haired, though in her own thick hair the tinge of red was scarcely noticeable. On each side of her nose, near the eyes, were a few freckles.

The hundred thousand daily movements, which her mobile hands had been performing for years in the cardboard-box factory, had made them slender and nervous, like those of finely organised women, who are the product of breeding and inbreeding.

On her feet, which were rather small for her build, she was wearing her best shoes. She had on a thin summer frock, and the curves of her body showed through the tight material, retaining the natural innocence of nakedness. As she opened the door, carrying a large, full, milk-coloured earthenware jug in her hand, Carl was bending over the gas-cooker.

I wanted to fix this up before the war, he thought. The effect of Anna's presence was so strong that he did not say the words aloud,

although at that moment, feeling as he did, they would not have been a lie.

Anna looked adorned, as though she were wearing flowers.

He stared at the woman standing fresh as milk in the doorway, and involuntarily drew together the edges of his open shirt across his bronzed, muscular, black-haired chest. He had no coat on. Only trousers and belt. His white shirt was crumpled. Some days before, he had washed both himself and the shirt in a river, and allowed both to dry in the sun.

Although Carl was shaved and washed, the wild scent of stream and forest and the long, long journey clung round him. Thus he had reached civilisation, where there was a bed, four walls, and Anna.

She said, "Good morning!" And her voice exactly matched her appearance, her gait, her body, her mouth.

The movement with which she set down the milk-jug, bending down because she held the paper bag full of rolls under the same arm, revealed her whole body.

She laid the table scrupulously, as though for an intimate feast, examined the effect, and

finally folded two paper napkins with particular care. All the time a man stood by the window, looking on.

The constraint of the evening before had vanished. Anna was quite changed, as though she had unexpectedly gained, during her night's sleep, the conviction that she was ready for life.

Carl's eyes followed her everywhere ; and when she tried to pass by him to fetch a jar of fruit, he found no words and no time for his wooing.

Anna's body trembled in his embrace, as a forest tree trembles before the storm breaks.

With her arm still round his neck, she let herself slide on to the chair. " Eat first ! "

He heard the promise in her words.

She prepared his bread and offered it to him with a glance. She could not eat. She looked on, with her hands in her lap.

" What slim little hands you have ! Like a fine lady ! "

She stood up, embarrassed, and walked to the window.

Slowly he went to her, drawn by the assent and agitation of her smile, and put his arm slowly round her. They stood motionless, holding each other.

And even when he raised his eyes, and found her lips trembling and open, and took them again and again, no word was spoken.

The thin material too firmly enclosed her breast and shoulders. He undid the buttons.

Weakly smiling, she herself loosened the shoulder-strap, and fell towards him as the garment dropped. The sun lay full on the white linen of the bed.

Carl hitched up his belt vigorously, and stepped backwards, deeply conscious of the blessing of doors, doors with a lock, and a key that could be turned.

Then he was standing before her again, where she lay in the sun, and he was convinced that there was no joy in the world equal to that of being sure of his loved one and of her surrender.

He stood there in his blissful certainty till she, submerged beneath his glance, shot up like a trout and drew him to herself.

The tenement was formed of six dilapidated buildings, making one grim block and enclosing three courtyards. More than a hundred workmen's families dwelt there, ruled by the

destiny of war, which condemned them all to the same suffering, the same penury, the same bread, and the same diseases.

The crying of babies rose here and there like the croaking of frogs in a marshy pool; often they combined in a chorus for minutes on end; they were never quite silent for very long. On that Sunday morning they cried to an accompaniment of tunes gaily played on mouth-organs.

A half-grown girl sprang out of bed, pressed a shrill bicycle-bell attached to the sill of the open window, and put her hand to her ear.

A moment later, a half-grown girl appeared in her nightdress at the open window opposite, pressed her bicycle-bell, and used her hand also as a telephone receiver. "Elfi speaking!"

"Good morning, Elfi! Alma speaking. Had a good night?"

"Oh, it's you, Alma! How nice of you to ring me up!"

The friends lived on the same floor and looked each other in the face as they telephoned. The court was only eighteen feet across.

"What are you going to wear to-day, Alma? I shall wear my blue."

" I thought you would. I think I'll put on my yellow."

Each had only one Sunday frock. But they sometimes enlarged their wardrobes by making an exchange.

" I think we'll look in at the pictures this evening. . . . What a horrible noise there is going on."

In a fourth-floor room, where a friend of Anna's lived (several times she had called down in vain to the window of Anna's room), a black vulcanite disc, bearing the device of a dog seated in front of a horn, was grinding out a military march, to the strains of which millions had left for the war.

" These noises are unbearable. I'm going to ring off. I'll call you up again later. So long!" Elfi pressed the bicycle-bell. Alma's bell shrilled out above the military march. Both girls disappeared.

Down in the depths, on a square of concrete, a fair-haired boy of four years old was standing. He was shouting skywards :

" Mariechen's got a baby,
She doesn't know its dad "

Some one knocked at the door. Anna started up in bed, her hand to her heart. The newspaper dropped through the letter-box.

"You used to be different, Anna. You used to be more ashamed." He lay on his back, looking upwards, absorbed in the idea of how much more shame there had formerly been in Anna's behaviour towards him. "Don't you remember the excuse you always used to make, every time, before you—before it was all right? And you always used to lie in a different position."

Involuntarily she drew away from him, and stared at him, astounded at his knowledge even of this, the most intimate of all her ways. Her face was big with amazement, and suddenly completely void of thought, as if the faculty of thought had been cut out of her with a knife.

"Quite different!" With gentle pressure he altered the position of her resisting right leg, and drew her right shoulder towards him. "Like that!"

Her head sank back of itself. In this familiar posture, the whole of her past life with Richard suddenly arose before her. In her surrender she

whispered his name, completely convinced at last that the man in her arms was really Richard. For her, at that moment, past and present flowed together and became one.

During the hours that followed, Anna had to make an inward effort to retain her belief that Carl was her husband. And she discovered that, even if one has not the power of engendering a belief by force, one can at least ward off an intrusive thought.

In her breast, above her stomach, was the psychic muscle which she had constantly to exert if she wanted to suppress the insistent critical idea that Carl was not Richard.

Carl, entirely absorbed in his love for her, was untouched by any such doubts. While he quietly caressed her and, drunk with happiness, received her caresses, his mind was already busy with the means by which, through energy and hard work, he could assure the needful foundation for his life with Anna.

Richard had worked for one week—from the day of his arrival in the city to the outbreak of war—in the machine-factory of Kipp & Gräf, and had been dissatisfied with his earnings.

Carl told Anna, while she was dressing, that he would not look for work at Kipp & Gräf's ; they were a poor firm, he said, and paid bad wages.

She shivered, as a vivid recollection touched her suddenly. The sensation was at once submerged. She still had a feeling of floating above the ground : a state exclusively emotional, and so fluid and agreeable that the critical thought was still unable to force its way through.

As she went downstairs on her way to make a few more purchases for the midday meal, the stairway seemed changed, still familiar, but in spite of its familiarity strangely different. The woman descending the stairs had changed.

Then came the sunny street, the different air, the fresh, morning air. The busy pavements. A little old woman hobbled by with a basket on her arm ; children were shouting to one another in play. A butcher's cart bowled past. Two workmen in Sunday shirt-sleeves were talking outside their door. She had to go to the shop and tell the butcher how much meat she wanted. She had to calculate. She had to see to it that the meal would be enough

for two. She had to think. Feeling retreated. Thought ruled. The whole weight of her body sank from her shoulders downward. Her head rose upward, clear and free.

"No, that won't be enough. Give me another quarter-pound," she said to the butcher.

For there was a man upstairs in her room. He, too, wanted food. She had a visitor. A visitor.

Yes, but a huge gulf separated her from her visitor. What had the man up there in her room to do with her? He had come yesterday. She had lived from day to day for four years, alone. And then, yesterday, a strange man had come.

And that morning? What had happened, happened to her, that morning? "I'll have a bone too, to make some broth." How had it been possible? A strange man. That was —terrible. She looked round in dismay.

On the way home she met an acquaintance, who lamented a further rise in the prices of dripping and flour. Anna looked at her in dismay.

"Yes; how much does that mean on the

week's housekeeping bill ?" Her acquaintance calculated.

Anna was afraid to go home. He was there. She wished when she went home to find no one there. She wished to think things out alone. To think out everything. How ought she to behave now ? What would come of it all ?

Anna's experience was not different from that of many women who, when they leave the scene of their adventure, and reach the street, the different air, the busy pavements, are suddenly sobered and cannot understand what they have done.

She climbed the stairs, burdened with all the feelings of a faithless wife who returns to her husband's house from an adventure.

She stopped on the first-floor landing. A man comes out of the world, out of the world which is as big as . . . comes out of the world to me, in my room, and knows all my past life. Better than I know it myself. Before I undressed (how could I have done that !) he had told me just where the three moles were on my body. Comes suddenly to me and reminds me of things I myself had quite

forgotten. All the time Anna was staring at the stencilled pattern on the wall of the staircase.

She would have preferred to go up another two storeys to her friend. There everything was safe and familiar ; just as it had been for four years. She could tell her everything. Perhaps she would know how to advise her. But in her own room a man's white shirt was hanging over the chair. Disorder. . . . What would he be doing when she went in ? Where would he be standing ? By the window ? It was quite true : the curtains *were* new. And when they had bought the others—the old ones, she and Richard—Richard who was dead, had been dead for four years. God in heaven, of course he was dead !—the salesman had said : " They're a bargain." He had said, word for word : " They're a bargain." The salesman had had a little black moustache, clipped very close, and two pimples on his forehead. Richard had pointed them out to her.

I only got to know him yesterday. It's impossible for him to call me Anna, she thought, before she turned the door-handle. He's an impostor. An impostor ! . . . And

I did that with him! Anger and shame and disgust were in her breast.

He had taken the bedclothes from the sofa and pushed it against the wall. The breakfast-table was cleared. Even Anna's bed had been made, rather clumsily, not smoothly enough. The whole room looked clean and neat. As she came in, Carl was sweeping up for the second time with the long-handled broom, sweeping up the last specks of dust.

Richard used to do that sometimes, she thought—the housework. But he never looked so happy about it.

Her anger and disgust, and the horror of having given herself to an impostor, disappeared as she saw Carl standing there, leaning on the broom-handle, like an honest scavenger who has stopped work to have a quiet chat with a passer-by.

She thought of the caresses of the morning, and it was Richard, none but Richard, to whom she had given herself. But the man there, leaning on the broom, was not Richard. The division between her husband and Carl, between the past and the present, was ineffaceable and clear.

For years she had not seen Richard so clearly as she saw him now. He was quite different from Carl—duller, slower, and had never said such things as Carl had said the day before. He had said that probably no one, whoever it might be, could lie in a field without chewing a blade of grass. Richard had been a quiet man, reassuring (always black stubble on his cheeks), and slightly stiffened by labour. Not so aggressive as this man. This man was like a—a coiled spring. He could be sharp and fierce ; she had noticed that already.

The event of the morning had conjured up her past with Richard as nothing had done before, and it stood between the two, dividing them.

How could she have been so crazy, even when they were in bed, as to believe for a second that this man was Richard ? Her Richard . . . ! And yet, after all, she had been in bed with him. It had been his arms, *his* arms, and his mouth. He was not strange to her either, and not displeasing. Not even now. Queer. And even the thought of what she had done would not be so bad, not so terribly bad, if only he would not insist that he was Richard.

"What are you doing there? That's no work for you!"

"Why do you speak like that?"

She turned abruptly away from him, her mouth twitching. "Don't ever again say that you're my husband! D'you hear me? Don't ever say that again!" Tears of anger stood in her eyes.

"But you said it yourself this morning. You said yourself that I was your husband. You called me Richard. . . . We belong together, you and I!"

"We don't belong together at all. I've never seen you before in my life. You only came yesterday. . . . My husband may be still alive. He may be still alive. You said so yourself. He may come back."

"Well, and what then? What if he does come back? What do you think will happen then?" A look of sudden wildness leaped into his eyes, which grew deep and very dark. He spoke with tense lips, but not loudly. "I don't care who comes. Or if nobody comes. We belong together."

His muscles relaxed. The contours of his face softened. "It's fate, Anna. It's fate,"

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CARL .. .. GUSTAV FRÖLICH

he repeated, and his smile and his voice were again pervaded by the deep calm of certainty.

Carl had a finely moulded nose, strong arms, and intelligent eyes.

Anna was on the point of laughing: he appeared to her so comic, for in his excitement he had risen on the tips of his toes, and had to cling to the broom-handle to save himself from falling. Once more, the immediacy and force of his feeling had banished all her doubts of his honesty. His fierceness, held in check by a strong will, had caused her grey eyes to open wide.

It was not a thought, but a kind of instinct, composed of anger, defiance, and inclination, that told her that he might conquer the past, which he himself had conjured up, if only he would relinquish his claim to be her husband, his claim to be himself that past.

No, it's too much—he's trying to impose on me. "Absurd!" Unconsciously she spoke her thought aloud. She was sitting by the window, the vegetable-dish in her lap, her fingers briskly scraping and slicing. She changed her position, gave the dish a petulant shove, and vented her annoyance on the carrots.

As she worked, she assumed a heedless, casual expression ; and yet the way she stood up, brushed the bits of carrot from her apron and carried the dish to the gas-cooker, the very way she moved her hips, were different from the movements she would have made had she been alone, or had she been indifferent to the man who sat behind her on the sofa.

He crouched there, with his head in his hands, filled with resolutions which were not to be carried out by muscular strength or will-power. He was on the point of springing up in sudden anger and making his demand : " . . . and if you won't, I'll take to the road again ! "

But he knew what the road meant ; it was still in his bones ; and he knew the paralysing loneliness of his former life.

He had once said to Richard : " A man keeps on asking himself how he can stand it : keeps on asking, and can't find an answer, no answer at all. Like a worm that's got to crawl a hundred thousand miles across hot sand. That's it—a worm without earth ! That's my life ! "

In spite of his strong character and pulsing

energy, which would have served for ten lives, Carl needed some one to cling to.

He remained crouching on the sofa. He knew that if he went away, he would come back on the following day. His tenacity and strength of will, which enabled him to achieve his purposes, sufficed to choke down the passionate rage which came storming up again and again in throat and neck.

Without turning her head she said suddenly: "I suppose you know exactly what I said to my friend when the news of my husband's death came? I suppose you know everything I did before I was married, as a girl or a little child?" And in her anger she wanted to add: Or before I was born?

To which he answered, slowly and heavily: "No, I don't. But I know what sort of child you were. Not very demonstrative; but not moody, either, like other children. You didn't get impatient when your mother was doing your hair. You knew how to wait, and you were cheerful without knowing it. I believe you ripened like an apple, that just keeps on growing bigger."

Not till then did he raise his head from his

hands. "I've always been longing for something. Probably you never knew what longing means, and perhaps you don't even now."

So it came about that through the imagination of another, whose love gave him the gift of sight, Anna saw for the first time in her life her own childhood and youth, and experienced it with warm emotion.

Before he had finished speaking, her hands became still. "What are you saying?" she asked, deeply moved.

My feelings being what they are, he thought, either she loves me, or it's all over.

"As for what you said to your friend when the news came—the false news—it must have been hard for you, as it is for any woman. It wrings your heart. . . . But I know you; you couldn't believe it had happened to you, or could happen at all. You're like a linden-leaf —and you look like one! Probably you didn't really believe it — even if you believed it. And then the time came for you, too, when you just had to go on living from day to day, living for nothing, nothing at all. You go on longing, longing for some one! I've been

through it. . . . Have *you* ? Have you been through it ? "

Anna had never been dissatisfied with Richard. She had never felt misunderstood ; neither had it ever occurred to her that he knew her. They had never talked of anything but the cares of the day. Even now she did not compare the two men. She stood there, numb with shame, because she had thought him an impostor.

Several times, by a word, a glance, a tone of voice, Carl had challenged something in her which had been lying fallow. She had had a feeling, since the previous night, that there existed within her wide, undiscovered tracts. For some minutes she experienced an exquisite and entirely novel sensation. But by nature she was slow to move. She could not go forward by sudden bounds. She was genuine, true to herself, as she lived, breathed, and acted. Her being, her existence in the present, was suddenly disconnected from her past with Richard, which she had outlived, which had paled and sunk behind her.

As time passed, Carl had to learn that loyalty may be nothing more than waiting.

Suddenly wounded by this past life, which

had been forced back into her like something alien and external, she was compelled to reject Carl's advances, although, behind the compulsion, the desire to yield to him was growing and vital. She was paralysed, like a sleeper in a nightmare who cannot stir.

By his claim to be Richard, Carl had given to the past the vital force possessed by memories of childhood. But, feeling as he did, all else would have been a lie. The woman who had once lived with another man was not his Anna. He, and none but he, had been bound to her from the beginning. For him, his lie was truth, and reality illusion.

Every evening, when he came back from his quest for work, he stood helpless before the obstacle which he had himself erected, and which he could not remove without violating his feeling. They had reached a level where the spring of life was dried up, where every exchange of feeling, every fruitful conflict, all physical union was impossible.

During these weeks she compelled him to enter and leave the house cautiously and secretly. No one was allowed to discover that he slept in her room.

IV

Anna's friend, Marie, lived with her sister, and had a fourth-floor room overlooking the second of the three courtyards. The room was the same length as the narrow iron bed which occupied every inch of space between the inner wall and the window.

By the window the room broadened a little. An iron frame stood there, with three curved legs and a wash-basin. There was no space for chair or table. When Marie washed in the morning, she had to kneel on the bed and thence plunge her face into the water.

One Sunday afternoon Anna was sitting on the foot of the bed, and Marie was standing on it quite naked, preparing to dress for a walk.

In the larger room next door, the man who lived with Marie's sister—whose husband was at the war—lay sleeping on the rust-brown settee. The sister's two sons, aged eight and nine, stood deep in thought before an old

perambulator, in which their six-months-old brother—the son of the sleeping man—lay with both little fists pressed into his cheeks. They were discussing how they could provide themselves with a truck for the afternoon.

"We'll just take off the body," said the elder, who had a screwdriver in his hand; "then we can use the chassis."

"But do it quietly or he'll start yelling."

They took out the eight screws, lifted the upper part, with the awakening infant inside it, on to the floor, and crept out of the room with the framework and wheels. "We'll put the body on again to-night. . . . There, he's beginning to howl!"

The man awoke also—he was a motor-mechanic—and looked round at once for the perambulator. The place where it had stood was vacant. Yet, beyond all doubt, there was a baby crying in the room. He rubbed his eyes and stared down, perplexed and half awake, at his son. A few seconds later he was smilingly carrying him up and down the room.

It had come about of itself, the result of circumstances. He had rented a place to sleep in—the bed of the husband who was at the

war. At first the table had stood between the two beds, to mark the frontier. During the first week, the light was turned out when they went to bed. For the money he would have had to spend on inferior meals in a cheap restaurant, the woman fed the whole family, which had been left unprovided for. The two beds stood side by side again.

The woman appeared in the doorway, her apron wet from washing and a scrubbing-brush in her hand. "Has he been crying?" Her face was grey, the skin flaccid. But the red-brown lips were smooth and firm and full of blood, and, being open, matched her wide-open, questioning eyes. She was older than the motor-mechanic.

"Look at that!" he cried, his face brightening again, and pointed.

"That's what the two rascals were talking about in bed last night." She gave the baby her breast, which was surprisingly youthful, white, not large, and with sky-blue veins.

The mechanic looked on, his hands in his trouser-pockets, watching with close attention his son's sucking lips and greedy gulpings.

In a few days' time the husband was expected home on leave.

The little room next door echoed with Marie's laughter. She was still standing on the bed, trying on, with Anna's help and criticism, a short chemise which she had made herself during the morning.

Still standing, she pulled on her stocking. Her leg, from the small foot to the knee, was slender, girlish, and beautiful. Above the deep mark of the garter, the woman began : the body swelled outwards in soft, rolling curves ; the skin was darkly discoloured and in places rough.

The band of her knickers, which were trimmed with open-work machine-embroidery of a coarse pattern, sank into her waist, and immediately above rose the slender, exceedingly delicate, inexperienced back of a child.

Anna handed her a cotton frock with blue spots. Even when her head and arms had vanished under the frock, she went on telling Anna all that had happened in the tenement since they had last met.

First appeared the short, outspread fingers with their short, broad nails, then the firm,

very narrow head, the face, with its uniform warm tint as of some rare wood, the fine eyes. The brows and curling lashes were much darker than her fragrant, fair hair. She had dimples that came and went in the firm smoothness of her cheeks, coming always with living charm at the bidding of her little mouth.

She let herself fall backwards, stiffly, at full length, and in an access of high spirits turned on her side as the mattress rebounded, and put her head in Anna's lap. Anna clasped her hands round the girl's glowing cheeks.

The noise of some one bawling with all the force of powerful lungs came from a ground-floor dwelling. The sound crashed against the walls, and was hurled echoing up the narrow court, past the fourth-floor windows, towards the sky. Another outbreak, lasting the length of a breath. Then a woman's shrill, rising voice.

"There, he's beating her again." Marie had started up. "They quarrel every day, and yet they won't separate."

The woman who was being thrashed had taken up with another man while her husband was at the war. Many women did it. And no

one could keep a secret. Marie could talk for hours of the hate and misery, the disease and guilt, the undeserved suffering and also the devotion and loving care, which the tenement housed.

It would be just the same with me, thought Anna: You take another man, because your husband isn't there or has left you. It happens every day.

On the second floor, Carl was standing behind the closed window, immobile as a prisoner who is learning how to wait.

"And when your husband comes home and sees what we've been doing, suppose he smashes everything up?" said the motor-mechanic in the next room.

A crowd had collected in a corner of the court: half-naked children, pale and consumptive, women in rags, men in shirt-sleeves. Livid faces. They had carried out into the air an old man, weak with hunger, who had had a fainting fit.

A powerful young labourer was standing in the centre of the court in the pose of an archer, with his body thrown backwards almost at a right angle. He drew his bow, a strip of thin,

flat steel, five feet long and almost straight, with all his strength, bending it to a semicircle. The long arrow of nickelled steel tubing, thin as a reed, whizzed up vertically into the freedom of the summer sky, made a slow, gleaming turn, and dropped back into the narrow, gloomy court. A dangerous missile in strong, unsteady hands, which as it falls may wound even the archer himself.

He shot again and again. All looked up, huddled together in the corner: a grey, shadowy group. Even the old man who was weak with hunger looked up.

The bicycle-bell summoned Elfi to the window. "Frau Anna's got a visitor. He's standing down there. . . . Had a good dinner?"

"Yes; carrots."

"Oh, carrots?"

Soon after, dressed up in their coloured finery, they were tripping arm in arm down the road up which Carl had trudged weeks before. Both had long legs, without calves and as thin as sticks, and wore gaudy green ribbons in their hair: two water-wagtails.

Marie also had looked down. Carl was still

standing motionless at the window. "I say, who's your visitor? . . . Tell me, who is he?"

Anna's silence lengthened into a confession. She was grave and agitated. And thus she went out of the room.

There would be some one there, when she went down. Not merely a casual acquaintance. Such an hour as that on their first morning brings people near together. Very near. It binds them together. Some one would be there when she went in. And that would be welcome. The room would not be so—so orderly and empty as it used to be. . . . Was her husband still alive? *He* claimed that he was her husband, and in a way that almost compelled belief. She must break him of that habit, that foolish habit. She must make him give it up. She must outwit him.

Yes, but supposing her husband was still alive. What then? What if he were still living? . . . Then the whole thing became impossible. One couldn't just leave one's husband without more ado and go to another man. It was not so simple as all that. . . . She had only to think of his eyes, the way he

used to look at her. And of his big, honest hand. Yes, and of the complete trust she had had in him. With him she had been sheltered and safe. That was true. Safe, absolutely safe!

"We could go for a walk, if you'd like to."

"Yes," said Carl slowly, and looked down at his clothes.

"You can put on one of my husband's white collars if you like."

"I want nothing at all. Not a thing!"

Only me. He'll take nothing from him but me. "You say he's still alive, and yet you want me to be your wife!"

"That would make no difference to me," he said, with a black look. And suddenly, without leading up to it, and in such a tone that she knew he had been thinking of it while she was away, and had made up his mind to say it: "The salesman that recommended those curtains to us had a very small, black moustache—no bigger than that!—and he had two pimples on his forehead, if you want to know. I pointed them out to you at the time."

A movement of angry impatience ran

through her. "I don't know where you got hold of all that. I'm angry with you! It's hateful, what you're doing—hateful!"

His face stiffened with a despairing impotence, such as a man feels only when the gravest wrong has been done him.

The faces of many of the passers-by, dull with the boredom of their Sunday afternoon walk, were touched for a few seconds with life, as they caught sight of these two: Anna so smart, so mild and strong, striding so lightly from her tall hips, and, at her side, the dark, unkempt man, without a collar, glowing as a live coal glows through a thin coating of ash.

They were walking towards the town. It was the first time they had been out together. What fulfilment for him, who had tramped on foot for three months, across frontiers and through forests, to get to her! Now he was walking by her side.

He dropped back a few paces to see how she walked, and the vision he had had of her, away there in the steppe, came back to him. She had appeared to him in a tight dress of smooth, brownish stuff, like a dead woman coming back to her lover, wandering without

substance down a familiar path under the trees. He paled before the immediate onslaught of his feeling.

I'll wait years if necessary, he thought, and was unwilling to wait a minute.

As she turned round, ingenuous wisdom in her face, and in her glance a wise temperance and inner richness, she experienced suddenly the sky-blue sense of having turned to him once before in exactly the same emotional situation. " Is it possible——"

He guessed her meaning. For his will and emotions circled unceasingly round the same point. " It is so."

" —that I've been here with you before ? "

They turned into an avenue of trees that connected the suburb with the town : the avenue of his vision. " You were here once before, under the trees : it was evening and you were waiting for me."

Richard had never told him that. But he knew it was true. He had seen Anna walking and waiting. The truth was in him, and he had spoken it.

Down the whole of her left side, which was next to him, Anna felt a melting warmth.

Reality, with its hindrances, vanished. Innermost feelings burst forth into life. Their hearts streamed together.

Anna did not think. She believed what she felt. And to taste the final sweetness, she had to give words to her feeling, she had to say the name. And she said it : " Richard."

He closed the magical circle : he said simply : " I love you." Thus they went.

" And the child ? Now do you want it ? Now do you want one ? "

As her lips opened to him, her eyelids drooped and closed. Yet she was a woman slow to move.

He asked again with his lips against hers. With the deep comfort of her unspoken answer in his heart, he entered the inn-garden with his tall wife.

Had he not been there once before, as a child ? And the landlord's daughter, yes, Anna, with her arm round his neck, had pushed the glass of milk towards him.

Seated under a tree in an almost deserted corner of the garden, they were for a time very close to each other, as though life had never led Anna and Richard together, as

though chance with its millionfold activities, which opens the door to lifelong errors and decides whole destinies, had been utterly overcome by the force and desire of two hearts, hearkening fresh and strong to each other's beat, as though it had been thus from the beginning.

A workman's family arrived at the next table. Before she sat down, the woman hurriedly unpacked the sandwiches she had brought, and the four children, their noses scarcely above the table-edge, began to clamour like a greedy brood when the mother-bird alights on the edge of the nest. And so the outside world arose afresh.

Anna began to think again. But the lot that falls to one among thousands had fallen to her : she loved. She was in the power of that absolute necessity, whose source is unfathomable, which is independent of the circumstances, the appearance, the character, the particular qualities of the loved one ; which is there or is not there ; which is heavy as lead and insubstantial as an odour ; smaller than an atom and as great as the earth, which lifts a man into bliss or sinks him into such misery

that he envies a rat. The inscrutable mystery had unfolded itself within her.

The brass band began at eight. The garden was already full. The patrons were punctual. Carl noticed the glances of the people sitting round. But the relation between Anna and himself had already reached the stage of profound and mutual sympathy. Carl had passed over all the preliminary stages, even that of being proud of showing himself with a desirable woman. The outside world in all its manifestations could no longer affect them. Surrounded by the tumult of life, they were absorbed in the fight against and for each other, in which wounds were inflicted and healed again with a look.

A little old man, bent almost double with age, floated from table to table under his red, blue and green cloud of balloons, like the small, black car of an airship.

They went back through the avenue, where their late experience still lurked. Both thought of it. They walked slowly and in silence : two persons who belonged to each other.

Anna resisted. It had come upon her too quickly. And nothing had yet been cleared

up. This obscurity was repugnant to her. But she was suddenly assaulted, with irresistible and stinging force, by a temporary but passionate readiness to blot out all that had gone before and believe Carl in everything.

As they went through the main door, the two wagtails put their heads together and whispered. Their faces and arms were burnt by the sun. Elfi was wearing the yellow now, and Alma the blue. They had exchanged frocks by the lake.

"You're a lucky one, Frau Anna; I must congratulate you," said a man on the staircase, and went on downstairs. "It does happen now and then that a man comes home after he's been reported dead. But it's pretty seldom."

"We heard about it last night," cried Elfi loudly.

"Who from?" asked the man, who was now on the next floor below, and Anna heard the answer: "From Frau Bösch."

She was an old woman who knew all that happened in the tenement, and gossiped about it with anyone who would listen.

And what now? thought Anna. And suddenly she was in the arms of her friend, and felt the tears on Marie's cheeks. "Why didn't you tell me about it? The whole house knew it but me! You are a one for keeping secrets! I want to see him. . . . Herr Richard, I must see you at once." It was dark on the staircase.

"Well, and what now?"

"How glad I am!"

Anna was glad too. What a load of happiness, she thought. A load of happiness! Full of the sense of it, she went to the door, opened it, and lighted the lamp.

She could have said that Carl was not her husband, that she had a lover. There was nothing in that to make a secret of. It was a matter of course for the dwellers in the tenement that women whose husbands were in the field should have relations openly with other men.

And she could have said, without fear of being convicted of a lie, that Carl was her husband. For in those eight days—from their arrival in the city till the outbreak of war—Richard had made the acquaintance of no one,

had not even spoken to their neighbours. And four years had passed since then.

But it was not these considerations, though they flashed through her mind with the quickness of thought, that decided her, but her own wish and what she had just experienced with Carl.

The question of whether he was Richard had become a matter of no importance. She knew that he was not lying. And her own emotion and experience was not a lie. It was happiness, real and true. Let them all think he was her husband, if he and their good fortune willed it so. And she, did not she wish it ?

There he stood and gave Marie his hand, quite unperturbed. Stood there quite unperturbed, with his shining face.

Oh, she wished it too ! She wished it ! She wished it ! . . . This wild fellow, who could be as still as the geranium plant there on the sill. Just because he too was happy and no longer alone. . . . No longer alone ! How good that was ! How good, how good ! . . . Marie's radiant face. She was actually laughing and crying with pleasure at the same time.

Life was beautiful after all. Only it had passed her by for so long.

Instead of the many-voiced quarrelling of the afternoon, peaceful silence rose up to them out of the court. Strange notes began to sound, thin and fragile. Two tenement musicians were tuning up their home-made instruments : a piano—a macaroni-box of deal, one-foot-eight in length with black-and-white painted keys—and a fiddle made from an old cigar-box.

One lifted the frail little piano on to a bench they had brought with them, and carefully adjusted its position, so that it should stand firmly, and not fall to pieces ; the other turned his fiddle slowly round—it had a neck like a cello—and rested the neck cautiously against the bench. The music sounded equally cautious.

The great, workman's hands and thick fingers of the pianist could hardly find room on the keyboard. Both musicians had to restrain their natural vigour, lest their fragile little instruments should go to pieces while they played. So they were compelled to make good music. They sang the tunes. A hundred

dwellers in the tenement listened. Not a sound. Even the babies had been silenced. The three friends in Anna's room listened also. The tones were sweet.

When they had finished, the fair-haired, four-year-old boy began to bawl his song: "*Mariechen's got a baby*——" He could not help it. The music had taken hold of him. He shouted to heaven with all the strength of his lungs. He knew no better. He waved his arms and legs in his enthusiasm. "*She doesn't know its dad.*"

V

The neighbours helped to define the position. Carl was, for them, Anna's husband. The children called him "Herr Richard." The grocer, the baker, the butcher, congratulated Anna on the return of the husband they had all thought dead. The tenants next door greeted him, morning and evening, as "Herr Richard." Marie was "a bit in love" with him. "Not too much." She was allowed to call him Richard. Every one called him Herr Richard. Anna herself used the name Richard. And she not only used the name, it gradually became a matter of course, part of her feeling towards him.

She no longer needed to go to the factory. Her husband had got work. Every Saturday he handed over his week's wages to the last pfennig. Then he invariably hitched up his belt, and boyishly held out his hand, and she gave him his pocket-money.

Anna's bed was wide enough for two. He slept by the wall. She got up quietly in the morning and cooked the breakfast. Just as it had always been.

She had kept her unspoken promise : she was in her third month.

He would not let her lift or carry. After his work he ran up and down stairs, fetched the wood and coal and potatoes, and scrubbed the floor.

There are people who become and remain good, so long as things go well with them ; and women who grow inexplicably beautiful when they are happily in love, who carry always in their eyes and faces a deep and radiant glow, so that no one can pass them in the street without seeing and feeling it.

A hundred times a day Anna was enraptured —when she saw her man, when she thought of him, when she remembered something he had said to her, how he had looked at her, that she had conceived by him. Her life sang.

His devotion was passionate, and at the same time tender and protective, like the love of a mother. At home, in the street, in the

factory, on the way to and fro, he saw and felt only Anna. His life was Anna. His blood held the form of Anna. He was quiet with it all: she loved him.

In the evenings he worked at the completion of a little invention—an improvement in the working of a revolving lathe—it had already been tested and had brought him in a few hundred marks. For the child they expected.

On his way home of an evening, the thought that he would find Anna at home was like a clear, blue lake within him. The consciousness of it filled him. And when he did not find her there, when she was not in the room, she was none the less there. She was there in the way a glass stood by the gas-cooker, the way a pan was hanging, the way her sewing-basket lay on the sill.

When she came in, he sat still, following her with his eyes. When a breath of air stirred the loose hair on her forehead, he was happy. She felt it all. When she was preparing the supper, she stroked his head and shoulder as she passed him.

"Where have you been, Anna?"

It sounded like joy itself when she answered,

with the voice that matched her so well: "I've been to the cobbler's. I think he'll make a good job of your boots, Richard."

That sounded to him as though she had said: "I love you more than my life."

He loved her a thousand times more than his life. Up to his return, his life had been the eternal unrest and heartache of loneliness.

What distinguished these two from their fellows, and raised them above them, was that they had reached the consciousness of their happiness, and had won therewith the present moment, depth, inner tenderness, which could reveal itself at any moment in a glance.

They experienced the physical, the caresses of the night, in unity with the inner light of their love. And for them there came no separation. They attained in their caresses to the meaning and summit of life.

Trifles contained the whole. A narrow fold of her cotton dress, which fell from her waist, defining the line of her hips, on which it was somewhat bleached by the sun, held for him the measurelessness of his love.

They did not say much. They were not fluent speakers. They had the full, grave

heartbeat of life, the deliberate step, the shining face. They were rich.

Anna, the tidy one, could fling her sewing into the corner. And simultaneously with her, he would stand up. "Aha, let's go out!"

They had the town with its people, the encircling fields, the air, the woods, because they had each other.

After one of their walks, which had led them along the main railway-line—the bare telegraph-poles, stretching away into the distance, had seemed to them beautiful—Marie came into their room, sobbing.

Her sister's husband had come home on leave from the front, had looked long at the motor-mechanic's little son, listened to his wife's explanation, and, without saying a word in reply, had gone out of the door and taken the next train back to the front.

The three sat at the table under the lamp. Marie was in tears. She stretched out her hand. Anna put her handkerchief into it.

"We never believed he'd take it like that."

Anna looked at Carl and then at Marie. "What ought he to have done?" She felt

her heart in her throat, and did not know why. " She was his wife."

" When Frau Moser's husband came back, the man she was living with—Fritz—just cleared out. Which was right and proper. Or look at Herr Häusler. He's been back three weeks, but the post-office assistant is still living with them, until he can find another room. They're all three living together in the one room," said Marie, still crying.

" But Herr Lienert beat his wife nearly to death. And now they've separated. You take the matter lightly, Marie, too lightly."

" It's partly the way we live, the way we live is partly to blame. . . . But he'll come back. Of course, he'll come back. And I shall fall on his neck, Anna. I shall ! "

" All three living together, you say, all three in one room ? " She looked at him. He had not yet spoken a word. His eyes were not in the room. She did not know why her heart was beating so fast.

" I shall fall on his neck. And then he'll be kind again." Her charming face was already smiling. The dimples reappeared.

"Richard, I'm going to make some coffee. May I, Anna ? "

It often happened that Marie had begun to laugh when others were still depressed, or was in tears when others were still joking. Events affected her quickly and violently. And, just as quickly, her spirits rose again, like a cork that bobs down at every wave, but is never sunk, even in the wildest storm.

His eyes were still in the steppe between Europe and Asia. Anna laid her hand on her throat, where her heart was beating fast.

A small vice was screwed to the window-sill. He did the rough work, for which he required a lathe, on the machine in the factory, but the filing and fitting he did at home in the evenings. He was building the full-sized, final model. It was smaller than a boy's fist.

From the way he at last got up, laid out the parts of his model on the sill, chose his files, and began to work, Anna felt that he would yield only to death.

Both shivered, feeling themselves brushed by the wing-tips of fate. And so they lay that night, united heart to heart by a providence which could bring them life and could

bring them death, but not separation. They had no thought of guilt.

Eight days later Marie's sister received the news from the military authorities that her husband had been killed six days before.

Many of the dwellers in the tenement, who had never previously made any adverse comment, began now to blame her. Insults were shouted after her. She had hounded her husband to his death. She received abusive letters. The motor-mechanic, conscious of his fault, looked stiffly in front of him when he crossed the courtyards morning and evening. Even in their own room they spoke only when necessary. The woman did her work. A few weeks have to pass after such a mournful event before the normal habits of life can reassert themselves.

Soon the neighbours were exchanging nods with the motor-mechanic on the stairs, and Marie's sister heard only on special occasions what sort of a woman she was; for instance, when she asserted her claim to the wash-house, whose use had always been a source of friction between the various parties.

The battles between the two boys and the

rest of the crowd of children lasted longer. Several times a day they were involved in fights in defence of their mother against the taunt shouted from every door and corner: "Your mother's a whore!"

Anna stood by the open drawer. She had been lying on the sofa, had suddenly got up and gone to the drawer, and was standing there, looking in, without knowing why.

But when she held the faded post card in her hand, on which the military authorities had informed her, four years before, that Richard had been killed, a hot stab struck her and passed right through her body. She read mechanically.

But he may be in now any minute, she thought, and peace came down like a cooling shower. "I suppose you know everything I did before I was married, as a girl or a little child?"

Of course, she knew when she had said that. . . . Yes, he knew everything. More than any other person in the world, more than she had known about herself. And all because he loved her so much. She wanted

only him; all her life only him. Anything else was impossible, was even unthinkable.

There had been something many, many years ago, in the remote past. "Killed in action on the 4th of September, 1914." And this was all that remained of it—this post card. Was that true? But he had said the military authorities had made a mistake. . . . What had they been mistaken about? What about? That it was her husband? Or what?

She felt suddenly so tired in her head and limbs that she had to support herself on the edges of the furniture in order to reach the sofa. She dropped on to it, and fell asleep at once.

It struck six and seven. She was in a deep, dreamless sleep, her muscles and limbs relaxed. The postman lightly touched the brass knocker and pushed a letter through the slit.

In that hundredth part of a second the dream began, invading her relaxation like the first peal of thunder in the stillness. She shot up, terrified, and went to the door. On the floor lay a letter from Richard. She could not pick up the letter because it was secured with four wire-tacks.

Now I can't possibly read it. That's a good thing. Can't read it. He must take out the nails himself. He'll be here any minute. . . . But if he reads it everything will be lost. How terrible! All lost—everything!

She fetched the pincers, knelt down, drew out three nails, then three more long nails. But there were still four nails in the letter. That's a good thing! No one can unfasten that letter. Satisfied, she lay down in order to go on sleeping, and awoke.

Yes, that was only a dream, that the letter was nailed down. It's lying there on the floor. I was only dreaming—need only cross the room and pick it up. She went over to the door, looked down at the letter, and at the same moment saw Richard, suddenly standing before a heaven-high, invisible wall of light. "That's only a wall of naught," she said.

Richard had no head, looked at her with eyes that were not there, and spoke with an invisible mouth: "Give me the fork."

She handed him the fork with the one prong shorter than the others. Richard sat at the table, without a head, and cut his bread into long strips.

That's only a dream again. I can't stand it. I must wake up. Wake up! I must! With paralysed strength, she writhed herself free from thick, clammy bonds of rubber, flew with two strides to the letter, tore open the envelope, and could not read for agitation and anguish of heart.

She was still lying on the sofa, sleeping deeply, both hands under her chin. Richard was sitting at the table, without a head. He chewed, smiled lovingly, looked at her, and said: "It doesn't matter. I understand it all. It was bound to happen like that. Sleep a little while longer."

Wonderful peace settled down on her. She dreamed that she was falling asleep again, and felt, in her sleep, the deep satisfaction of sleep.

Her dream ended as the letter reached the floor. It had begun when the postman touched the brass knocker a tenth of a second earlier, but in her sleeping consciousness it had lasted for hours.

At the sound, she started up out of sleep and dream, heard the nailed shoes of the postman clattering on the wooden stairs as he went

down, remembered immediately that she had dreamed she received a letter from Richard.

Her heart ceased to throb. She thought she was still dreaming, and raised with deep anxiety both hands to her throat. A letter lay on the floor.

The envelope bore Dutch stamps, was disfigured with red-pencil marks and the rubber stamps of many censors, and smelt strongly of carbolic. It was open.

Before her marriage, Anna had once dreamed that she received a letter from her mother, who was living in an almshouse and had not written for years, and when she awoke the letter was lying in the box.

Her first impulse urged her to burn the letter unread. Numb with fright, she went to the gas-cooker.

"Dear Anna,—I don't know yet whether I've been taken prisoner by the English or the Japanese. I'm on a ship. They stick you in the coal-bunkers and you sweat like anything. The other ship ran on a mine yesterday; there was just two explosions and the whole ship was gone, nothing more to be seen. But it stunk for hours after. Then we should never have

seen each other again. To-day we're steaming on again. Always through minefields. None of us knows where we're going. I shall give this letter to a Dutchman, because they're going to let him go home. If you ever get it, dear old Anna, remember I still love you just as much as you know I do, and I should like to be back with you at last in our little room. But the food is good and plenty of it."

The letter had been written three months before. She grew icily calm, as a man suddenly grows calm in the midst of his shock, when a lightning flash has passed before his eyes.

The letter had a strong smell, stronger than that of the envelope, and she felt ill, as though her stomach were full of stale water. She placed the letter on the shelf, next to the jars of fruit. It stuck out a little beyond the edge. She pushed it carefully back with her forefinger, till both edges were level.

The child moved in her womb. She had to run down quickly to the shops. Richard would be home any minute. Would the shops still be open ? Richard was always so hungry when he came home. But that letter had arrived. A letter from Richard. Perhaps she

could still get a few eggs. . . . Yes, we should never have seen each other again, if he had happened to be on the other ship. . . . The dairy was always open rather late.

She had already reached the first floor, when she turned back, climbed the stairs again, more quickly than usual, hastily unlocked the door, and read the letter again. It must all be a mistake. It was just a sheet of paper, words, words written in pencil. They belonged to a former life. Like the post card from the military authorities. Many, many years ago. How could these words overthrow her life, when it was so natural, so full and beautiful and happy, every day ? " . . . I still love you just as much as you know I do, and I should like to be back with you at last in our little room. But the food is good and plenty of it."

How came she to be here ? Had she come down the stairs, down the street, into the shop ? How had that happened ? In mind, she was still sitting on the chair in her room, reading the letter. She raised her head in confusion.

" You look pale to-day, Frau Anna," said the proprietress of the dairy. " But a woman

in your condition has all sorts of ups and downs. Your husband was here a minute ago. I know how you feel; I've been through it. You don't need to worry. You're a sound, healthy woman."

He turned the door-handle. "Not at home." Unlocked the door. Inside the room, he looked round inquiringly. He could smell the letter. "Carbolic," he said, and grew frightened. "Has anything happened?"

"What did my husband want, then?"

"Oh, he's been worrying me again about the milk for you. But as it is I'm giving you all I can."

The knowledge that he would be there when she reached home, the walk up the street, the ascent of the stairs, gave Anna the needful calm and resolution to face the event, which had suddenly acquired in her mind its true and terrible gravity.

He was still standing by the door, quite obsessed by the fear that something might have happened to Anna, that she might have died in premature childbirth. Suddenly he saw himself standing on the railway track, between the lines, chest and arms rigidly braced to

resist the train that rushed towards him—fate, that had to be held up at any cost.

Then he heard a step, recognised it immediately as hers, listened. No one in the world came up the stairs like her. He spun round, enraptured. "There you are! What's happened?"

They stood in the doorway, face to face.

"I've had a letter from my husband."

Suppose she's been unfaithful while you've been away, and taken some one else? Lying in the grass of the steppe, he heard Richard's answer: "What's it to do with you? You can keep a clean tongue in your head anyway. And as for Anna, I'd——" And he saw how Richard hove up his pick and brought it whizzing down on Anna's head.

But she hasn't deceived him at all, he thought; it's something quite different. He opened the door for Anna. She put down the paper-bag, and, as she seated herself, she looked at him. "Now tell me everything!" As passive and prepared in her acceptance of truth and destiny, as if she had said: Whatever comes, I can do no other. If he kills me when he returns, I shall not shirk it.

He was not a shirker either. But he was a man, and only accepted his fate after he had fought, with mind and will, knife and teeth, to the end. Death, yes! But not renunciation! he thought, and told her all.

They sat till darkness had fallen. The four summers in the steppe, where one day resembled the next in its utter loneliness, and the winter months in the great barracks of the prison-camp, passed before her eyes. He suppressed nothing. It gave him pleasure to stand before her spiritually naked, and to show her how his feeling had arisen and how it had grown beyond all bounds.

Often she interrupted his story with questions, which he answered as he would have answered them to himself.

"Once Richard said to me: 'I'm fond of Anna, as a man is fond of his wife. And that's how it is with her. Because I'm her husband. She's a sensible woman.' And then I suddenly saw you, Anna, in an avenue, in *the* avenue. You were waiting there. Evening was coming on. No one else. Only you. That took hold of me so. You were waiting. That's the only word I can use. It was as if you

weren't on this earth. And then it was all over with me. Then you were with me; I saw you night and day. From that time I knew all about you."

She shut her eyes; she leaned towards him, and they sat cheek to cheek. Life and time stood still in this union of profoundest happiness, which is not granted to mankind, because hard by stands the pain of life, and, before ten breaths can be taken, resumes its great blind progress.

"If he doesn't let me go, we can't go on living."

"If that's the only way," he said, with a dark glance. And once more, by their readiness to suffer death, they won the white seconds from life.

As she prepared the evening meal and he turned to his work, they felt that the cooking, the eating, the work, the daily round with its thoughts and feelings, had lost all weight, all present sense and value. The whole scope of their life was occupied from now on with waiting. Their life was nothing but waiting, which devours life.

He left his work, read Richard's letter once

more, sitting at the table, his head propped on both fists, as though engaged in a difficult task.

" ' . . . To-day we're steaming on again. Always through minefields,' " he read audibly. And a wish-idea flitted from his blood into his brain ; he said : " Perhaps——" and spoke no further.

She felt and knew immediately what he had not said, and had to lower her glance.

They had touched existence at a spot where guilt wells out of it, like a dark jet.

But as they looked up and both leaned back, and felt, glance in glance, the unfathomable mystery of their love, which stood opposed to Richard's right, they came to themselves again, free from the wish for Richard's death, and ready, if payment must be made, to pay.

This final union of two persons, beneath which glows the buried meaning of all life, confers the power to overcome many dangers, which for others would lead to disaster, many obstacles, disease, and even death.

November came. The thick red ice-crust over Europe, of frozen blood and a hundred million fates, burst. Dynasties vanished. The exhausted cities were flooded with soldiers.

The exchange of prisoners had begun. A few men who had been taken prisoner came back to the tenement. Carl and Anna waited. Richard might open the door at any moment, or he might return in a month, or a year, or never again.

Carl's will and emotions were in a state of torpor. A separation would have shattered his life like glass. Anna often longed for the crisis, the catastrophe, since it would deliver her from her present state of wavering between hope and a despairing readiness for death.

Neighbours told her of domestic quarrels that had broken out on the return of the men, and of one case in particular which would probably end disastrously. The man, used to shooting, had already threatened her with his army revolver before he knew the worst.

Carl was in danger of losing his work, because he had refused to undertake the erection of some new machinery at a mill in another town. Every day, one minute after he had left the tenement and boarded a tram, he was seized by uneasiness and anxiety lest Richard should have returned in the meantime, and these feelings tortured him all

through the day at his bench, giving him no respite till he was back again in their little room.

One morning—he had already travelled some distance—he jumped off the tram, convinced that he had caught sight of Richard in another tram that had just passed them. He ran back, and saw from a distance a soldier in a long coat entering the house. When he reached the street door, he felt as though he had received a heavy, stunning blow in the chest. Now it had come, the terrible event. He went quite slowly up the stairs. At the door, he was attacked by a feeling of giddiness. He did not know how he opened the door.

No sign of a soldier. Anna was sitting by the window, inactive, motionless. She was waiting. She was not at all surprised to see him, with his devitalised face.

He went to her without a word, took her head to his breast, and went silently out again.

VI

A RAILWAY train, so long that the last carriage could still be seen from a village station when the engine was already entering the next village, laboured as slowly as a street car through the masses of snow.

Even on the open platforms at the ends of the carriages, soldiers were standing and sitting, released prisoners, homecomers of every sort, with their boxes, sacks, and bundles. Bundles, heads, and backs stuck out of every window; even in the cattle-truck, "For eight horses," from which the broad sliding-door was gone, lay a grey mass of men. Into the train, which had seats for three thousand passengers, ten thousand had been crammed. A train of wretchedness, crawling through a wretched country.

The train moved at one-tenth of its usual speed. There were no longer time-tables. Often the driver had to pull up on the track

and wait till he could get up steam again. The engine was worn out, the fuel was half sand and stones.

A cyclist, in the snow of the country road, managed without exertion to keep up with them, and even to talk in comfort with a soldier at the window. "Yes, yes, revolution! It'll be different now. It'll all be altered." And when the train stopped again, he climbed aboard. There were no tickets, there was no longer anything.

In one compartment, as grey and gloomy as an underground cell, stinking of smoke, stale damp, and sour sweat, a soldier, who came from a country where there was still chocolate, drew from his coat-pocket a small bar of this delicacy, wrapped in silver paper.

"Hello, where did you get that from? Well, that's very interesting; that's really very interesting," said a Bavarian, with a pallid smile. "Let me just smell it. Is it the real thing?"

He was allowed to smell it. All eyes were fixed on the chocolate, on the silver paper, that shone like a star in hell.

In solemn silence, in the midst of which a

pointed witticism suddenly burst, the owner shaved off a tiny portion with his pocket-knife into the outstretched hand of each of his companions, and stuck the rest back in his coat-pocket. "For the kiddies, you know, for my kiddies."

Then he brought out the photographs of his children and his wife. Bit by bit, they all produced from their wallets the photographs of the members of their families. The pictures passed from hand to hand. There was a confused hum of stories, descriptions, exclamations. Voices, broken with feeling and restrained tears. The homecomers had nothing. Nothing but their longing.

Richard handed back the photograph to the owner of the chocolate. "I haven't got one of my wife. I've often regretted in all these years that I couldn't jog my memory, and see what she looks like. But it won't be long now."

"Then you'll see her in a state of nature," said the Bavarian. He always wore the same pallid smile. He had a dark, civilian suit, soft hat, pointed beard, had been standing holding on to the luggage-rack throughout the journey, and had a word for every one.

A series of jolts ran through the train. It stopped again. They were used to that. The conversation went on. Richard climbed across bundles and legs, and over comrades seated on the floor. The door was barricaded with masses of luggage, so he scrambled out through the window.

Some one emerged from practically every carriage. They yawned and stretched themselves, opened the bottom buttons of their coats. Even the lavatories served as a camping-ground for the men, or else their doors were blocked with baggage.

Richard took several cautious, limping steps. He was testing his ability to walk. Shortly before he left, the wheel of a carriage had passed over his leg. He had been two weeks on the way, day and night. When he had made sure that the train would be there for some time, he stamped off some distance across the snow, sat down, and pulled up his trouser-leg. The whole of his shin, from ankle to knee, was dark green like unripe plums.

The others had all climbed aboard. He stood alone on the dazzling expanse of snow, a black, sharply defined silhouette: broad

shouldered, no badge on his cap, his army coat reaching to his ankles. From the thicket of brows and beard, which left scarcely anything free but his nose, his eyes looked out like those of a solitary animal that is seeking company.

Black, filthy, lousy, unkempt, spat out by the war, he looked, as his dark figure approached the twentieth-century means of locomotion, like a surviving primitive man who had just crawled out of his cave in the earth.

He thought : In two hours I shall be there, in our room, with Anna, to whom at that same minute the midwife was saying : " Everything's going on well." Although she had felt no kind of discomfort, Anna had yielded to Carl's wishes and had herself examined.

" You're quite a picture. And I see so many. Good heavens, if they only knew ! But you're a fine, healthy woman. A sight for sore eyes," said the old woman, smiling. Anna lay naked and white on the sofa. The clean scent of baked apples filled the air of her well-warmed room.

Richard's black, unkempt ball of hair appeared at the window. He stretched his long

arms into the compartment. His comrades pulled him in.

Towards evening the train rolled past the houses of the suburb, past the long, low factory building, where Carl was still standing at his bench.

The men in the compartment had grown familiar with each other during the journey. They had taken part in the talk with the closest attention, even when it dealt with quite trivial matters. They still went on talking to each other. But they gave only half-glances and half-replies. Each was already absent, each in his thoughts was already with his family.

Richard was a man of unusual physical and mental stability, and could not be shaken from his forceful composure by events of either a pleasant or a painful nature, so long as they remained within definite but very wide limits.

The daily, endless, often severe and always humiliating torments of the prison-camp, by which many of his companions had gradually been crushed and robbed of the last shreds of self-respect, had not touched him in the least. So long as the limit of what he could

bear was not overstepped, so long as another straw could still be added to the load, he felt and acted as though nothing whatever had happened.

Only once had the solid dam within him suddenly burst. He had returned to the camp, starving, after a day of hard work. The guard came into the barrack. For no cause and without speaking, he snatched the basin from Richard's hand, threw the food on the black, stamped floor, pointed, and roared: "Eat it! . . . Eat it, you swine! . . . Get down and eat it!" And he struck Richard in the face.

Even then his feeling did not show itself. But suddenly he was like a machine, which has been thrown out of gear by a light touch on a lever, and goes on running as before, but is now disconnected.

So he went out, neither more quickly nor more slowly than usual, crossed the open space to the tool-shed, and took his pickaxe. It was quite clear to him that half an hour after killing the guard he would be shot. But that did not weigh with him any longer. That was the guard's affair: he shouldn't have carried

his bullying too far. There was nothing more to think of now. Nothing more to be done. It was self-evident that he must kill the guard, just as it had been self-evident that he must endure the other torments unmoved, as mere facts.

On his return, the guard had already left the hut. Only the chance that the man was transferred elsewhere that same night had saved the lives of him and Richard.

When at last the train rolled into the station and came to a stop, Richard took leave of his companions with the stolid, powerful composure, which was as much a part of him as his own head, and strode, at the hour when Anna was spreading the table for herself and Carl, who was now leaving his distant factory, alone and limping across the station-square, his grey bundle under his arm. Even his joy and eagerness could not drive him to a quicker pace. For four years he had been yearning for Anna, and in that time he had learnt to wait. Now he was as good as with her. He had reached his goal. The actual meeting could not add perceptibly to what he felt already.

Only a quite unwonted gaiety, fluctuating, intangible, and light as down, fluttered round his massive certainty, like a butterfly round an elephant.

It was a long way. No trams were running in those days. Carl's way from the factory to the tenement was about a third longer. But he strode out sharply and had sound legs.

Anna had laid the table for the meal, and went down to get some bread. Towards evening, when she knew that Carl would soon be home, she always grew calmer.

An empty dray overtook Richard, drawn by two powerful horses, and open at the back. The driver stopped and asked the limping homecomer if he would like a lift. Richard scrambled in backwards. The horses fell into a slow trot.

He had to walk the last bit of the way. At the street-door, the motor-mechanic was standing with Marie. Richard studied the building attentively. Four years ago it had been new; now the façade was neglected and decayed.

"Are you looking for some one in the house?" asked the motor-mechanic, and

Anna's excitable friend glanced nervously at the dishevelled soldier, who looked as hard as iron and overflowing with strength, and yet bore traces of the immense burden of the war-years.

His unwonted gaiety made him say: "Yes, yes, my wife." And he mentioned her name. "She still lives here, doesn't she?"

"Yes, but——" began Marie, in confusion, and did not know how to go on.

"—but Frau Anna can only be married to one man and not to two at a time," said a young workman with a cheerful grin, completing her sentence. He was standing in the doorway, and Richard had already passed him.

As he went limping on, in his long coat that brushed the stairs, tired, crusted with filth, somewhat bent, it was as though he had been wandering alone on foot for four years, through loneliness and horror, misery and anguish of heart, and had just reached that spot.

Anna heard his heavy, limping tread, which sounded as though two men were dragging a load up the stairs. She looked so fair and radiant, as women sometimes do before their confinement.

He had not knocked. The door was open. A black, strange man was standing in the doorway.

Neither spoke. Anna questioned him in silence, her eyes fixed.

With one glance round he had taken in the room. "Well, Anna, don't you know me?"

She did not know him. She would not have recognised him in the street. She knew that it was he—must be! She felt her blood stream upwards from hands and feet, felt a hot prickle under her skin.

He went up to her and held out his hand. She placed her icy fingers in it. And then he took their relationship completely for granted. A forest of hair, in which a mouth must be concealed, approached her face. Her head turned away of its own volition.

"Too dirty? Yes, that's the journey!" Not till then did he put down his bundle, on the same chair as Carl had done months before, took off his coat, and, suddenly aware of the contrast between that long, thick crust of dirt and the spotless room, held it up by the collar, not knowing what to do with it.

Once more his glance travelled round the

room, shining with a foretaste of happiness at the prospect of living in that cosily warmed, comfortable, spotlessly clean, wonderful dwelling. His eyes rested on Anna and his joy overcame him: "Well, Anna, old Anna! You've been waiting a long time, and now you're surprised that it's all over."

And she, who had resolved a thousand times to tell him everything at once, in the first minute, she lied by keeping silence. She could not commit murder. Despite her months of brooding, night and day, on his return, the full and terrible gravity of what had happened did not pierce to her heart until she was face to face with the fact.

She had lost the power of speech. There was no word that she could have spoken. There was nothing more to fight over. Puzzled, he watched her go to the door, stiff as a risen and walking corpse, and so out.

Down the stairs, through the courts at a run, down the main street: towards Carl.

Who had taken a short-cut through a byway, since the trams were not running, and turned into the main street when Anna was already out of sight.

The young workman, who had said that even Frau Anna could only be married to one man, was still standing smoking at the entrance, and looked after Carl with an inquisitive smile. "What'll happen now?" he asked his two companions, to whom he had already told the story. A number of people in the tenement knew by this time that a soldier had returned, who claimed that Anna was his wife.

As Carl hurried on and crossed the court, the neighbours stood at their windows, watching him.

Ever since the thought of Richard's return had been hanging over them like fate, the two lovers had lived in an unreal world, into which no one and nothing could penetrate, so closely bound to each other that even the smallest service was a declaration of love.

Without ever having considered the reason, Carl had always slackened his steps when he reached the first floor. And to-day also this gave rise to the immediate feeling that Anna was eagerly awaiting him.

He opened the door, still in the belief that she had heard his steps, and, like him, inwardly melting, was sending out her love to meet him.

The change in his feeling was comparable, in its force and suddenness, only with what a man must feel who has left his room for a moment, goes back, and, as he crosses the threshold, drops into nothingness, because there is no floor.

" You ? " said Richard, in surprise. But his composure still held. He let a dirty shirt fall back into his opened bundle. " Fancy seeing you again, and so soon ! . . . I only got here three minutes ago, I tell you. . . . But sit down." He pointed to the chair. " Or there, on the sofa."

Something prevented Carl from asking where Anna was. He sat down. On the sofa.

Still that scarcely appreciable, delightful gaiety, such as only a massive, iron-hard man could have, when, after immeasurable exertion, he has come at last, completely unbroken, to his goal.

" Do you live here then ? . . . Had anything to eat ? When did you get back ? She'll soon be here, then she'll give us a meal. It's all ready."

He looked with restrained pleasure, like a child with its presents at a Christmas party,

at the temptingly laid table, and then over his shoulder at Carl, as if to say: You see, that's how I live now. That's Anna. That makes up for everything.

The pressure on his heart grew steadily greater, as Carl watched Richard empty his bundle, put the things that were still clean in the drawers of the dresser, and the soiled ones on the chair in the corner.

" Anna must wash these right away. They must be properly boiled with soda." Without a moment's thought, quite familiar with the room and its contents, he pulled out the top-drawer of the dresser and placed his papers in the right-hand corner, where they had always lain. " Make yourself at home. Take your coat off. . . . It's good to see you here."

It's because he goes about as though he were the host, that I couldn't inquire about Anna. . . . I must tell him everything now. I must tell him now.

The resolve at once removed his inner paralysis. All feeling vanished. It's a matter of life and death, he thought, suddenly braced in every nerve and icily cold, as a man who

takes up his position for a duel, determined to kill his opponent or fall himself.

" Here's Anna coming," he said, and stood up.

Richard did not feel the chasm that opened in the tone of those three words.

Wet with sweat, eyes wide and unseeing, hair hanging over her forehead, Anna stumbled into the room. " Is he here ? " She stared first in the wrong direction, then fell into Carl's arms.

As he held her to him, he felt under the icy chill a glowing point of happiness. Richard came over to them, frightened but still unsuspecting. " What's the matter ? Are you ill ? "

She found enough strength to free herself. She leaned against the wall, staring in front of her, distraught and bewildered.

Carl felt as though he were firing a shot, as he said : " You must let Anna go."

Richard could not grasp it. It came from a great distance, and needed a long time to reach him. While it was still on the way, before it had reached him, he thought : If he's had her, I'll knock them down, both of

them, and they won't get up very soon. And in his terror of losing her completely, he was ready, with the next heartbeat, to forgive.

"What's the matter?" he asked, and thought, already calm again: He's talking nonsense—imagining things to himself. "Come, speak up, Anna. What's the matter? . . . Anna!"

No reply. He went towards her. Carl stepped between. "Anna is my wife. I'll explain everything to you."

Suddenly he saw that Anna was pregnant. "Oh, that's it? . . . What is there to explain to me now, you swine!" But with the same composure as in the prison-camp, when he left the barrack to fetch his pick.

He's had her once, she's done it once, and now she's going to have a child. And he wants to explain it to me, the swine! As for Anna and her pregnancy, I shall have to accept that. We shall have to get over that. But as for him there, that's enough and too much! He knew where the axe stood and went to that corner.

The blow that was to fell him came unexpectedly, and from quite another quarter.

Anna flew towards him. "I can't live except with him. Kill me! It just happened like that, Richard, it just happened like that!"

"Can't live except with him? You can't live except with him? . . . You don't want me? Don't you want me?"

"I can't help it now."

That was more than he could accept, more than he could bear; he could not strike now He collapsed inwardly, like a felled tree.

He sat at the table, unable to believe it. "You can't? . . . Why not, Anna, why not? . . . You can't, Anna? You like only him?"

He wanted to go on fighting for the light of his life, when it was already extinguished. "Come, what is it? Explain it to me, explain it to me," he said, lost.

He started to get up. "Well, I must, I must——" He did not know what it was he had to do. He sank back on the chair. After that, he did not speak another word.

They looked at him, crouching there, unkempt and stiff with dirt, all his supports gone, a man who had forgotten in childhood how to cry, and now sat, with bowed back, staring

dry-eyed into vacancy—and pity tore them in two. From that moment their fear was gone.

She heard Carl's voice, saying, "We must go now," and began to pack a few things into a handbag.

Often she had to pass by Richard, her glance often rested on him, and yet the thought never entered her mind, to yield to her pity and stay with him. For nothing, nothing in the world, is so cruel as love, in which magnanimous devotion, even complete self-surrender, stand next to the most murderous egoism.

Marie knocked at the door. A timid knock. And came in timidly. No one spoke. She helped Anna, and was a witness of the cold execution.

They went about, opening drawers, packing. Richard saw and heard nothing. Scenes from his past with Anna came and went before his mind's eye. Everything had been so good. He made a movement, raised his head and shoulders, as though he wished to ask again, to try again; his head sank down in silence.

Anna had finished. She put down the handbag. "Richard." And took it up again.

"Only go," he said, and for the first time his mouth was visible, wide open, under the thicket of beard.

She did not dare to offer her hand, looked helplessly at Carl and Marie, and turned to the door.

It was with Carl as with a lawyer, who has defended a man condemned to death, and goes one morning, an hour before the execution, to pay his last visit, and on leaving does not know whether to say "Good-bye" or "Good morning," or how to take his leave. He went out without a word. On Marie's downy, uniformly tinted, peach-like cheeks, already quite wet with crying, the tears were rolling down in quick starts.

A man and several women were standing on the second-floor landing; they said nothing when the two lovers passed. The neighbours who were gathered at the entrance to the second court, excitedly discussing the case, stepped aside, let them go through, and followed them.

The crowd of children and the two water-wagtails, arm in arm and blue with cold, joined the procession. Indignant faces behind

the windows. Excited cries and the first word of abuse let loose the insults that followed.

The people of the tenement, who had not disturbed, and had even scarcely noticed, the open relationships of married women, were embittered by Anna's cunning and deceit, which, for six months, had enabled her to abuse successfully the trust and credulity of the whole neighbourhood.

Marie, dissolved in emotion, revolted by the shouts and insults, cried tearfully to the crowd that pushed close round the departing lovers : " She believed herself that he was her husband."

The jeers and laughter of many voices broke against the walls of the entry. Thus they passed out of the house. Carl carried the handbag.

On through the snow. It was some time before the first stragglers dropped behind. The half-grown lads still followed. One made a snowball and threw it after the two lovers. Then he too trotted back, hands in his trousers-pockets and shoulders hunched up.

" Go back to him, Marie ; go back to him," begged Anna.

Marie had already made up her mind not to leave Richard alone. Ten steps more and she stopped, restored again to her natural gaiety, and called, clear as a bell and glad to be alive : " Anna ! Good-bye, Anna ! "

They reached the broad bare expanse that lay between the town and the suburb. Deep, fresh, untrodden snow received their noiseless steps.

They turned into the avenue, in which Carl, lying in the steppe, had seen Anna waiting. Moon and snow illumined the night. The frozen branches threw tortuous shadow-patterns on the white surface. The stars glittered coldly.

They did not speak ; they did not think. They walked in an unfathomable mystery, and nothing could sever them till death.

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Henry Williamson (Author of *Tarka the Otter*, *The Pathway*, etc.) writes in a letter to the translator :

" Leonhard Frank reminds me of Zweig in *Sergeant Grischa* : Frank and Zweig are spiritual peers, but Frank, having (I fancy) suffered more personally, his vision is higher, clearer, more subjective ; just as his scope is narrower. Frank is the white-hot centre of a flame : Zweig's creative fire is diffused over a wider range. Symbolism and realism alternate and blend with Frank, and play almost entirely on what we call the spirit : Zweig recreates what has (in effect) happened. Both are real writers. Frank has that rare something that isn't acquired. One has to read *The Robber Band* with a sympathy and understanding akin

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to Frank's own to get the full effect of it. One understands why there was a war inevitably arising out of the events, described so wistfully, with such a hovering of the wings of tenderness, in *The Robber Band.* As for *The Cause of Crime*, it is the spirit and effect of that crime of 1900 odd years ago, repeated in a book very modern in feeling and scope. I'd read anything that Leonhard Frank wrote, for in spirit he has reached the end of the (selfish and scale-eyed) world. I found in *The Robber Band* and *The Cause of the Crime* what I am always looking for—books in which I can lose myself — books that absorbed me — just as I was absorbed by *The Case of Sergeant Grischa*—books by real writers, read with tears."